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## **Shift In Focus Of Aid Programas For Refugees, Refugee Repatriation**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On March 12, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) official Michel Gabaudam told Inter Press Service (IPS) that since 1990, aid projects for refugee groups have, for the most part, been aimed at facilitating voluntary repatriation or integration into communities where the refugees were already living. Included were 34 aid projects, all developed by Central American governments, and financed by foreign governments and UN agencies. According to regional government statistics, the displaced in Central America number approximately 658,000. Over the last two years, an estimated 110,000 refugees have returned to their places of origin. This massive repatriation, said Gabaudam, has resulted in a shift in the focus of international aid efforts. Refugee aid programs currently prioritize all persons residing in a particular area, i.e., repatriates and people who did not emigrate. Gabaudam added that integration of displaced persons requires not only aid to repatriates, but also for the local population, many of whom have "suffered as much or even more than those who left." The UNHCR official said mass repatriations have resulted in the formation of new communities composed of returnees and those who never left, and both groups tend to be very poor. Gabaudam noted that continued armed conflict in Nicaragua "is not essentially ideological, but [rather] economic, a battle for material resources." Gabaudam emphasized that the UNHCR and international donor organizations "want to end charity-type aid [and instead] help people reinsert themselves in the local economy by giving credit and support for productive work." (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 03/12/92)

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